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An

Inaugural Dissertation

on

Lunar Influence

Submitted to the examination of the

the

Trustees and Medical Professors,

of the

University of Pennsylvania,

on the day of April, 1808.

for

The Degree of Doctor of Medicine.

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An Inaugural Dissertation on &c.&c.

In all scientific pursuits we should be extremely cautious how we admit those things which partake of the Marvellous; and in no subject whatever should we be more guarded against this than on Medicine. "The science of Medicine says an excellent writer ought to be kept as free of Miracles as possible." No superstitious theories as regards the cause and nature of diseases — no preposterous remedies suggested by the whimsical old woman, or, perhaps, still more fanciful physician, should ever gain admittance into this "Divine Art." Indeed, when I reflect on the subject, the new and improved aspect, which Medicine has assumed within a century past, seems to be more owing to a spirit of skepticism which has arisen and an ardor for canvassing the theoretical opinions of preceding writers, unfettered by the trammels of groundless prejudices, than to the many new discoveries which have been made. By ridding it of the immense mass of rubbish by which it was unfortunately surrounded for so many ages, it appears in quite a new form, and shines with its proper lustre.

That veil of obscurity which so long shrouded this

Blessed science from the eyes of the common people and confined its important truths to the temples and the priests, is at length happily removed. Yes, I repeat it, this Magnum Dei Donum, as formerly considered by the vulgar, those enclosistered arcana, which were so long locked up in the hallowed fane, have slipped from their sacred cells and readily unfold their mysteries at the first demand of the most moderate capacity. The abolition of that monstrous practice of publishing medical works in a language unintelligable and obsolete contributes not a little also, to our facility of acquiring a knowledge of this useful art: when the excellent principles which have lately been established and proven to be correct by experience precludes the possibility of its enemies ever in future stigmatising it with the unmeaning epithets of uncertain and fallacious and as in a game of hazard every thing doubtful. That it may still be said to be in a measure uncertain and fallacious tho' we would by no means pretend to deny: in fact unfortunately for the human race it is too true not to be admitted: but may not the same thing be said

of every thing else. Who would renounce the Science of navigation and abandon all the advantages resulting from a commercial intercourse with the different nations of the earth, because navigators have sometimes been deceived by irregular variations of the needle? why, then, renounce the Science of Medicine or accuse it of uncertainty in an unlimited sense because we are not always able to determine the event of a disease or invariably foretell the effects which will result from the remedies we employ. But while I am thus enlarging on the enlightened state of Medical knowledge the following question seems whispered in my ear: How Physicians then completely freed themselves from every thing like prepossession in favor of every opinion and are such things alone admitted as truths as are proven to be so from correct observation and experience? happy would I be were I able to answer this question in the affirmative: but truth forbids it. Although we live in the 18th Century prejudices superstitious prejudices I fear still prevail among us. I shall not in this improper place take upon me the task of pointing them out wherever I suppose them to exist

This at any time would be laborious and unpleasant
I shall however mention a few which ought to be
admitted by all who seriously reflect on the sub
ject. The first I shall take notice of is the belief
in the contagious nature of bilious epidemics
and the efficacy of Quarantine establishments
in preventing their propagation from country
to country. As the ingenious and justly admired
professor Rush very aptly observes in his Lectures
The practice of nailing horse-shoes over or the
door of a dwelling house in order to avert the pow
er of witches is not more truely ridiculous than
those expensive monuments of human folly
erected in our ports. The very name indicates
from what source this baneful practice originate
ed. To point out clearly that there is a radical
error in the very principle upon which they are
founded would be no Herculean undertaking.
but it has been already done, I should suppose
to the satisfaction of every man of sense.
Those strictly too do the physicians of the present
day adhere to the old Hippocratic doctrine of cri
tical days which has no better foundation and

Originated in a preposterous notion of the power of mind
What a fanciful opinion has Father Jacob also
transmitted to his distant sons respecting the in
fluence of the ~~moon~~ mind on the foetus in utero:
"And Jacob took him rods of green poplar, and of
the hazel and chestnut tree; and pilled white
streaks in them, and made the white appear
which was in the rods. and he set the rods which
he had pilled before the flocks in the gutters, in
the watering-troughs, when the flocks came to
drink; that they should conceive when they
came to drink. And the flocks conceived before
the rods, and brought forth cattle ring-streaked
and speckled and spotted. And Jacob did sep
arate the lambs, and set the faces of the ~~lambs~~ flocks
toward the ring-streaked, and all the brown in
the flock of Laban: and he put his own
flocks by themselves; and put them not
unto Laban's cattle." There probably is near
by the source of that mistaken belief which
till within a few years so generally prevailed
among physicians as well as the vulgar.
See Gen. C. XXX Vs. 37. 8. 9 & 40th.

Jacob! Jacob! hadst thou been as well acquainted with anatomy and physiology as with the duties required of thee by thy God thou wouldst never have given an argument from Holy-Writ in support of so great an error: which imprints on the tender bodies of a beloved offspring the image of a rat or bat or toad or a turtle entwines them with hissing snakes clothes their little frames with a Lebrac-coat of various hues or sometimes O mirabile! ushers them into the world with amputated limbs fractured bones or destitute of a head. Many other opinions equally fallacious with those mentioned and equally resulting from prejudice and want of reflection might be pointed out but as I did not contemplate doing it from the beginning I shall content myself with mentioning one other which I intend shall be the subject of my particular animadversion in the remaining sheets. I allude to the influence of the moon upon the human system and terrestrial bodies in general which opinion is no so generally received among us

That the moon does exert some and a pretty con

siderable influence upon our Globe by means of the light (and heat probably) which she derives from the sun and transmits from herself to us no one ever pretended to deny and this would be a piece of skepticism which shall not originate with me I only mean to contend that it exerts no occult no inexplicable influence exclusively of these. I am well aware that in this opinion I shall be somewhat singular indeed much more so than I would wish to be on such an occasion as the present: but truth is my sole object and I trust nothing will ever be able to prevent me from pursuing her. The doctrine I have ~~now~~ opposed I well know wants neither antiquity nor the weight of modern authority for its support but both are insufficient to create an entity out of no thing or change an error into a truth. As I said before the doctrine of lunar influence wants not antiquity for its support Among the ~~Hebrews~~ Ancients the moon was always considered as an object worthy of prime regard. By the Hebrews she seemed to be much more an object of reverence than the sun and was much more generally worshipped as

as a deity. The new moon was always welcomed with the sound of trumpets entertainments and sacrifice. A loose was given to the actions of men on those days and they were usually spent in the greatest festivity and mirth. The feasts of new moons were a miniature representation of the feast of trumpets, which was held on the first of the month Tisri (corresponding to our Sept.r) which was the commencement of the civil year.

The Grecians seem to have considered the moon as particularly favorable to marriages; and the full moons or the times of conjunction of the sun and moon, were held the most lucky seasons for celebrating them, because they imagined the moon to have great influence over generation.

The Spartans always looked upon the full moon as particularly favorable for any undertaking but more especially for those which related to war; and no motives could induce them to enter upon an expedition, march an army or attack an enemy till the full of the Moon.

The moon was supposed by the Greeks and Romans

to preside over child-birth hence she was so frequently invoked during times of labor under the name of Lucina. In all ages too has the power of the moon over the weather been believed to be considerable But the writers who treat of the signs of the weather as taken from the moon, derive their prognostics from circumstances which neither argue any real influence of the moon as a cause nor affords any foundation for such a belief: but are merely indications of the state of the air at the time of observation: such are the shape of the horns the degree and color of the light, and the number and quality of the luminous halos which sometimes surrounded her. Perhaps I should confine myself more particularly to its effects, or, more properly speaking, supposed effects on the human body: but the tides of the ocean have been so frequently pointed as a manifest proof of the moons action on terrestrial things that I trust I shall be allowed tho' it may be in some measure irrelative to medicine to bring forwards a few arguments which are calculated to show that even this theory is entirely unfounded in reason and fact. It is much to be regretted that men are so apt to ascribe

Effects to some concomitant circumstances which possibly may be only accidental or have nothing to do in the production of them. Thus bile has been supposed to be the cause of what have been termed Bilious Epidemics because it is accidentally vomited up from the stomach. and the esculent and wholesome root the potatoe was accused of producing the sickness shortly following its introduction into Europe nor is there any proof that the moon produces the tides save that high water appears in some places about the time the moon is in the meridian of that place I say only in some places for it is by no means uniformly the case.

If the Newtonian theory* respecting the tides of the ocean were well founded I should be glad to know why the tides under the equator are not higher than at the poles which are so much further removed from the pretended influence of that nocturnal luminary. Again why the current of the tides is directly towards instead of from the equator as they should be were the opinion of Sir Isaac well grounded..

That this is not the case is proven from the observations of Ellis, Leinhotten, Barents, Cook, Marlens, Byron, Carteret and others. Again if they be owing to the power of the moon why are the tides during our

* We commonly say Newtonian theory but it was advanced long prior to the time of that celebrated philosopher.

Summer so much higher than they are in the South sea when the moon passes then over into the southern Hemisphere which is also proven by the accounts given us by many navigators.* Why too are there no tides in our lakes the circumference of lake superior is upwards of sixteen hundred miles and yet there is no perceptible rising or falling of its waters Why too none in the Mediteranean, Caspian and Baltic seas the first is upwards of three thousand miles in length and near two thousand five hundred in breadth yet the moon even when in the zenith of this vast body of water produces no appearance of a tide. Moreover why is not the barometer affected equal to a column of water of 10, 20, 30, 50 or an hundred feet in height? the barometer if any is at any time very little influenced. Tho I might offer many other objections to the commonly received opinion respecting the cause of tides I shall omit doing it in this place and refer the reader to the excellent and ingenious work of De Saint Pierre which should be in every private library and perused at least once a year as

* See Dampier, Cook &c.

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well for our own improvements on scientific subjects as to teach us our humble and dependant condition and the mercy of God.

If then this strong hold be rescued from the hands of the upholders of this erroneous doctrine what shadow of proof can they have of its influence on the human body either in health or disease. Mead Mellsom and others have written particularly on the subject and are supported by facts to be met with in Darwin Moseley Jackson L.L. As to Dr Mead's treatise tho' frequently spoken of as containing the most positive it is in my humble opinion not worth reading and rather has a tendency to prove the contrary of what he intended by showing how have been the attempts of so ingenious and learned a man. As to Epilepsy periodical hemorrhagies of blood manicu relapses of fever menstruation and such like they are occuring every day and at all periods of the moon. Who has not known if he have ever been in extensive practice, epilepsy occur every day two days four days L.L. without regard to the moon.

Menstruation is going on every day nay every hour in the day and is equally independent of her even the women themselves who are so fond of ascribing effects to this body never attribute their periodical flux to this cause.

At what numerous and different periods do patients relapse into a state of derangement some of them must unavoidably happen on lunar periods otherwise I should at once renounce my opinion and adopt the doctrine of lunar influence. I should certainly believe the moon possessed of the power of averting or preventing their attack at certain period.

But when we consider the subject how much do our opponents take but how little chance do they give us of disproving their theory. They contend that the moon exerts her influence at the syzygyes and quadratures, and for three days before and three days after each of these aspects. There are twenty four days therefore in each synodic month over which at this rate is supposed to preside; and as the whole coinciti

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but of twenty nine days twelve hours and three fourths, only five and a half days are exempt from her pretended dominion. Hence though diseases should have no connection with the different positions of the moon and tho' they be distributed in an equal proportion through the whole synodic month yet any one who shall predict that an attack or relapse or any change will happen on any one of the twenty four days assigned, rather than in any of the remaining five and a half will always have the chances twenty four to five and a half in his favor.

But I perceive the narrow limits which I have assigned to my dissertation will not allow me to dwell longer on the subject of it I shall therefore put a conclusion to my imperfect essay as to its imperfections no person can be more conscious of them than myself In the eyes of no one will these sheets appear contemptible than my own Perhaps had not bodily indisposition prevented I might

have rendered it more worthy the medical school of which it is a production. Before concluding I must beg the several professors of the university to accept (tis all I have to offer) my sincerest my most grateful thanks for the instruction I have received from them in their professional capacities. Not being personally acquainted ~~with~~ to any one of them (save the benevolent social and hospitable Barton) I am indebted but for few acts of private friendship conferred. O kind and beneficent providence crave a misfortune can befal us in our pilgrimage through life from which we do not reap more or less advantage. Had this not been the case perhaps I should at present have labored under many obligations which I never could have freed myself from... Adieu! Prosperity attend all your laudable efforts..

Finis.